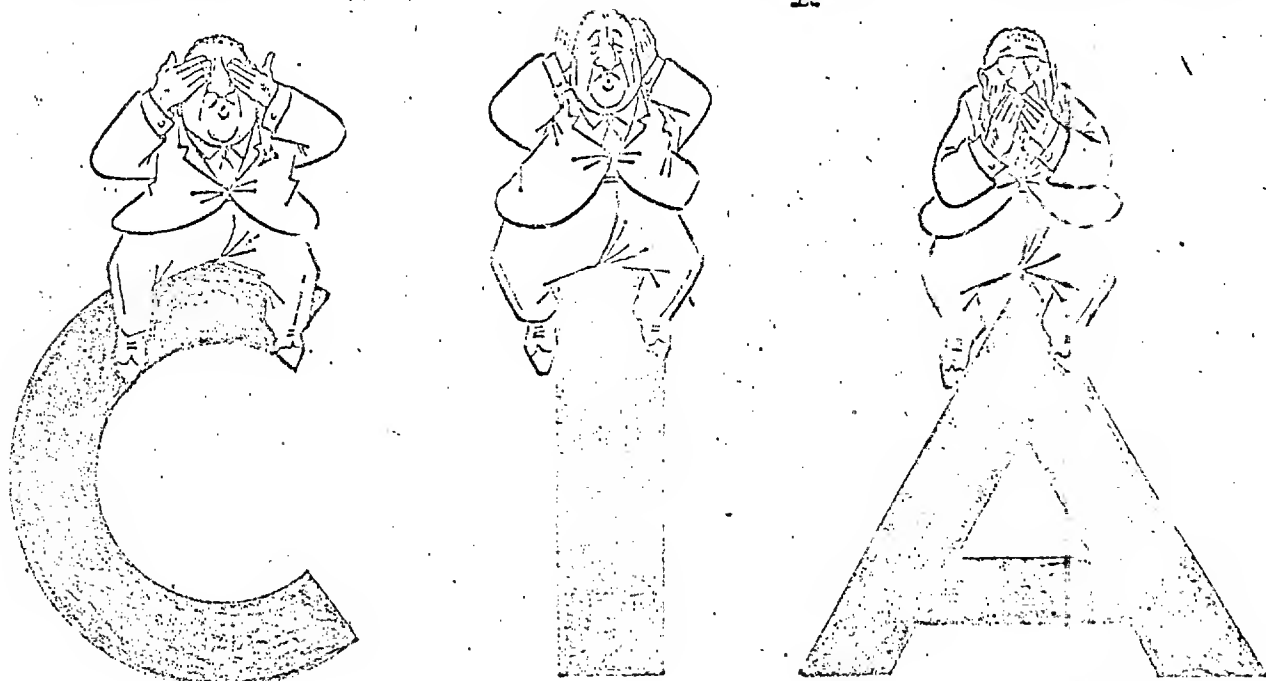


7 MAY 1972

Is the CIA Mixed Up in

Flora Lewis

Dope Traffic?



Vasquez—Siempre (Mexico)

New York—A weird series of incidents is bringing into focus the question of the CIA's relation to the booming Indochina traffic in heroin and the opium from which it is made.

Ramparts magazine has published a study of the drug trade in Indochina, pulling together many details of the widely but only vaguely known story and making a series of specific charges against top South Vietnamese, Laotian and Thai officials. Further, Ramparts charged that it is CIA operations and subsidies in the area which have made possible the big increase in the supply of heroin from Indochina.

Sen. George McGovern (D-N.D.) wrote a letter to CIA Director Richard Helms on April 13 asking six questions about it. One inquired whether the opium production in Laos was conducted with the knowledge of CIA officials, particularly around the CIA's secret army base at Long Cheng in Laos, and if the effect of CIA operations is to "protect the supplies (of opium) and facilitate their movement."

On April 29, CIA legislative counsel Jack Maury called on McGovern to give oral answers to the questions. He referred to a sheaf of legal-size papers for his information, indicating that the CIA has made a new investigation, but he didn't give McGovern the papers. He denied some of the charges, but said the CIA has been trying to convince the local people not to be in the drug traffic, which obviously implies that the CIA knows about it.

McGovern's query wasn't the first challenge to Helms on the subject. On March 4, Helms went with his wife to an evening event at the Corcoran Gallery

in Washington. The star happened to be Allen Ginsberg, the tousle-haired mystic poet. They met at a reception before the poetry reading, and Ginsberg took after Helms for what he says is CIA support of the dope trade.

The poet has been investigating drug traffic for seven years, and he has on the tip of his tongue a lot of precise names and places and figures. For one thing, he said, Long Cheng is a central collecting market for the opium flowing from northern Burma, northeastern Thailand and Laos (the fertile triangle) down into Vietnam and Bangkok and out around the world back to the United States.

Helms said it wasn't true, so Ginsberg said "I'll make you a wager." If he lost, Ginsberg promised to give Helms his "v.jra" which he describes as "a Buddhist-Hindu ritual implement of brass symbolizing the lightning-bolt doctrine of sudden illumination." Helms was to meditate one hour a day for the rest of his life if he lost.

Some time later, Ginsberg sent Helms a clipping from the Far East Economic Review saying that a number of correspondents who sneaked into Long Cheng over the years saw raw opium openly piled up for sale in the market there, in full view of CIA armed agents. He also sent a note offering Helms suggestions about how to keep a straight back while meditating, the best sitting position and proper breathing.

He has had no acknowledgement from the CIA since then. Helms didn't even enter toward him. It is terribly important to get him into an improved mind-consciousness. Anything that might help save

the world situation would be sheer Hari Krishna magic. The hard-headed people have brought us to such an apocalyptic mess."

Helms says that he has received no note from Ginsberg, and only vaguely remembers the bet. He called the charges "vicious," "silly," "ridiculous." He told me: "There is no evidence over the years that any of these people were involved in any significant way. Almost all the opium grown there is in Communist-controlled areas, Pathet Lao areas."

I asked about Thailand, and he said "I don't control northern Thailand. I don't control the Royal Laotian government; it's an independent country" (whose national budget and army are subsidized by the United States). "I don't know why you want to lay all this on the poor old CIA."

"We are not involved in the drug traffic in Laos or anywhere else. There is no evidence at all. To have evidence you'd have to get somebody in my office and have him say yes, I ran drugs with your approval."

At another point, he said "Opium's been in that part of the world for centuries," and "most drugs in the United States come from Turkey." He said he didn't know anything about a UN report that 70-80 per cent of the world's supply comes from Southeast Asia. And at another point he said "that part of the country (Laos) is loaded with opium. It's all over the area."

Maury, he said, had told McGovern that "it's all rot. It's not true." Later, Maury told me that he couldn't say anything about his talk with McGovern and that a written report which he has promised to give the senator "won't be available to you or anybody else for publication."

Meanwhile, the rate of heroin addiction among GIs in Vietnam is soaring dramatically, and drugs continue to pour into the United States. The implications will be discussed in my column that will appear tomorrow.

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THE FLORA LEWIS COLUMN

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THE QUESTION OF CIA AND DRUGS

by Flora Lewis

NEW YORK--Richard Helms, director of the CIA, is evidently much upset at charges that the CIA is involved in the flourishing drug traffic in Indochina, which is making a very substantial contribution to addiction among Americans.

Helms says flatly that the CIA is "not involved in the drug trade anywhere in the world." In the literal, organizational sense, he is probably right, although almost any ex-CIA man will testify that the field doesn't always tell the home office everything it knows. There is a tendency to protect headquarters from embarrassing insights and information.

Certainly, Helms is right when he says that drug control is not the CIA's responsibility. But two facts are inescapable.

1--Drugs are flowing into Vietnam and out of Indochina into the world underground network in dramatically increasing quantity. Not only is there a fearful growth in the amount of opium produced and exported from Southeast Asia. Alongside the traditional opium trade, heroin is being produced there now. This is new. The proof that it is true is the ready availability of heroin to GIs in Vietnam. Their powder doesn't come all the way from Turkey or France.

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Page Two . . . THE FLORA LEWIS COLUMN . . . Turkey or France.

While the standard American government position is that Turkey is the main source of the heroin reaching the United States, there is every reason to question whether this remains true. The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs has said that 80% of the world's opium, from which heroin is produced, comes from Southeast Asia. Dr. Alexander Messing, a U.N. narcotics expert, says that "if (the supply of opium from) Turkey were shut down overnight, there is still so much of the stuff around that it would hardly make a difference."

2--The CIA provides virtually all the transportation, the arms, and much of the money on which the people engaged in the Southeast Asia drug trade depend to keep going. The CIA isn't there because of the drug traffic. As Helms says, it does not in any way officially condone the traffic. But official CIA operations have made it much easier for the trade to prosper in security.

Partly, this is because the main producers of opium are the hill tribes in Laos and northeastern Thailand. Many are the Meo people, on whom the CIA relies for its "clandestine army" in Laos. Opium is their one cash crop. The CIA needs the good will of the Meos. It does not go out of its way to offend them.

Partly, this is because the very nature of CIA operations in Southeast Asia requires the co-operation of high local officials, daredevils, adventurers. Often those who are corrupt co-operate all the more willingly, since it facilitates their illicit enterprises. The CIA doesn't support what they do on the side, but it does support them.

While the extent of the trade is new, the trade itself and corruption have been going on in that area for a very long time. The CIA didn't start it. It went in for another reason, to fight the Communists, and its leaders felt of necessity that they had to work with the people and the situation which they found.

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Page Three . . . THE FLOIDA LEWIS COLUMN . . . they found.

That is the "sophisticated," "realistic," "efficient" view which has been the basis of CIA operations in the area from the start. It seems to make sense. You can't be too choosy about your friends in the face of enemies. That is why many American officials who have been aware of the situation have said nothing.

It is probably why Jack Maury, CIA legislative counsel, said that reports the CIA has made on the subject will "not be available for publication," although it does not seem reasonable that the U.S. government must keep secret from its people what it learns about an acknowledged national enemy--heroin.

But it is a view which does not accept but conceals reality, a view which has come to harm the United States more than it serves intended national purposes. It is the view which made . . . My Lai possible, and made the long ignorance of My Lai possible, and which made it possible for many Americans to sympathize with Lt. Calley when he was singled out for punishment.

It is a view which says that bad things are bound to happen in wartime, and since we are at war we must sacrifice many things including our scruples and our revulsion to drugs. Men have always felt obliged to choose among lesser evils. It is the human condition.

The central question, then, must be which is the lesser evil. What is it that we are doing in Indochina which justifies what we are doing to ourselves, specifically in this instance, what we are doing to promote heroin addiction? What is the value of the CIA operations in Laos and Thailand which so outweighs the evil of the drug traffic which has proliferated as an unintended result?

What is the value of a war, a crusade to give South Vietnamese "a chance" as President Nixon says, against so much death and misery and degradation, in the United States as well as in Indochina?

It is time to take another reading of the scales, Sacrifice cannot be a principle, it must be for a principle. The problem isn't whether to blame the CIA for the drug traffic. The problem is whether to continue endorsing what the CIA operations and the war have produced: the answer is no.